

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM LESLIE MARKS:

A CONTRIBUTION TO A SURVEY OF LIFE AND STRUCTURES ON THE COMSTOCK

Interviewee: William Leslie Marks

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Description

William "Bill" Leslie Marks was born on the Comstock at the Ophir house on October 17, 1918. He attended the First and the Fourth Ward schools in Virginia City, and then completed his education at the University of Nevada. During the Second World War, Bill Marks served in the Army Air Corps, and after the war he joined the reserves. During the Vietnam War he was called upon again, and worked with the Selective Service System. Today Bill Marks and his wife, Margaret, are the proprietors of the Crystal Bar in Virginia City, Nevada, an establishment that has been associated with the Marks family for eighty years.

Bill Marks, the descendant of miners, the son of a saloon keeper, and a saloon keeper himself, has been in a uniquely advantageous position to observe the changes that have occurred in Virginia City during this century. In his oral history he reminisces about his family's early experiences on the Comstock, and he discusses the shift in Virginia City's economic base from mining to tourism.

Mr. Marks also recounts the history of the Crystal Bar in Virginia City. The Crystal dates from the earliest days of the Comstock when it was associated with the historic Washoe Club. Over the years prominent men and women from around the world have visited the Crystal Bar, and it is known for its superb mixed drinks and its warm hospitality.

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LIFE AND STRUCTURES ON THE COMSTOCK**

PREPARED FOR THE STOREY COUNTY, NEVADA
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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An Oral History Conducted by Mary Ellen Glass
Edited by Mary Ellen Glass

University of Nevada Oral History Program

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University of Nevada Oral History Program
Mail Stop 0324
Reno, Nevada 89557
unohp@unr.edu
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PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber
Director, UNOHP
July 2012

ORIGINAL PREFACE

The University of Nevada Oral History Program (OHP) engages in systematic interviewing of persons who can provide firsthand descriptions of events, people and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are not history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiographical synthesization as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the OHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the OHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim

as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherency. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often totally unreadable and therefore a total waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the OHP will, in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled;

- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context; and

- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered

but have been added to render the text intelligible.

There will be readers who prefer to take their oral history straight, without even the minimal editing that occurred in the production of this text; they are directed to the tape recording.

Copies of all or part of this work and the tape recording from which it is derived are available from:

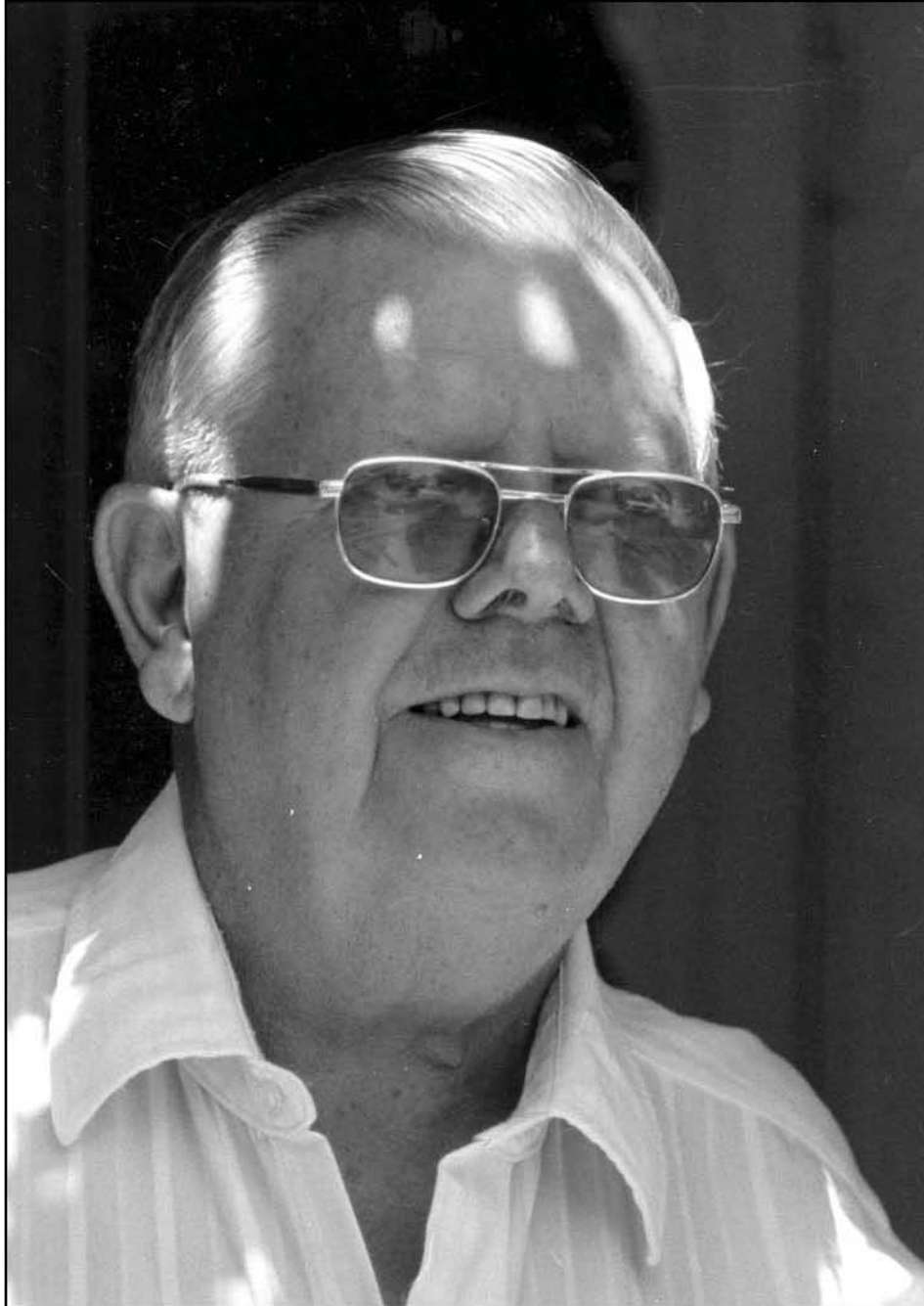
The University of Nevada
Oral History Program
Mailstop 0324
University of Nevada, Reno 89557
(775) 784-6932

INTRODUCTION

William “Bill” Leslie Marks was born on the Comstock at the Ophir house on 17 October 1918. He attended the First and the Fourth Ward schools in Virginia City, and then completed his education at the University of Nevada. During the Second World War, Bill Marks served his country in the Army Air Corps, and after the war he joined the Reserve. During the Vietnam War he was called upon, once again, and continuing in his commitment to patriotic values, he worked with the Selective Service System. Today Bill Marks and his delightful wife, Margaret, are the proprietors of the Crystal Bar in Virginia City, Nevada, an establishment that has been associated with the Marks family for 80 years.

Bill Marks, the descendant of miners, the son of a saloon keeper, and a saloon keeper himself has been in a uniquely advantageous position to observe the changes that have occurred in Virginia City during this century. In his oral history he reminisces about his family’s early experiences on the Comstock, and he discusses the shift in Virginia City’s economic base from mining to tourism.

Mr. Marks also recounts the history of the Crystal Bar in Virginia City. The Crystal dates from the earliest days of the Comstock when it was associated with the historic Washoe Club. Over the years prominent men and women from around the world have visited the Crystal Bar, and it is know for its superb mixed drinks and its warm hospitality. These traditions are still maintained by Mr. and Mrs. Marks at the Crystal Bar, a fine example of western hospitality in the spirit of the Comstock’s early days.



WILLIAM LESLIE MARKS
1984

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM LESLIE MARKS

Bill Marks: [My name is] William Leslie Marks. I was born in Virginia City, Nevada, 17 October 1918 in what was known as the Ophir house. This was the house used by the superintendent of the Ophir mine. At that time my grandfather was the superintendent of the Ophir mine. The Virginia City doctor [who delivered me] was Dr. Hodgins. My mother was Leslie May McCormick. My father was William Henry Marks.

Ann Harvey: Did you have brothers and sisters?

No. They had one child and said, "That's enough."

Then did your family first move to the Comstock?

In the early 1860s my father's father, John Marks, moved to Gold Hill, Nevada. He was a miner from Cornwall, England, and became very active in the mining in Gold Hill. He was also active in the Gold Hill fire department. In later years he was the chief of the Gold Hill fire department,

and my grandmother, Miriam Jones Marks, was an honorary member of the Gold Hill fire department. She is buried in the Gold Hill cemetery.

Could you tell me the names of the mines that your grandfather worked in?

Well, my grandfather worked mostly at the Crown Point mine in Gold Hill and at the Yellow Jacket mine in Gold Hill.

The Yellow Jacket had a famous fire in 1896, didn't it?

Yes. It did.

Did he ever talk to you about that?

No. He died before I was born. He died in 1914. But the Yellow Jacket fire was caused by heat and combustion in the lower levels of the mine—thousands of feet below the surface of the earth. There were many miners killed in that fire before it was put out.

Did your grandfather become a fireman after he was a miner?

No. He was a miner at the same time he was a fireman. They were all volunteers in those days. Nobody got paid— except maybe they had a houseman who received compensation. But most of the firemen—even through today—are all volunteers.

Could you tell me something about your grandmother Marks?

She was born in England [and came to the Comstock] in the early 1860s. She met my grandfather here in Gold Hill. She was a very busy lady. She was a housewife and raised about 14 children. She didn't have much opportunity to leave the home except to go up to the church, the grocery store and maybe socialize a little bit with her buddies around Gold Hill. My grandfather died in 1914 and my grandmother on my father's side was buried the day I was born, so I never knew either of them.

You said your grandmother had 14 children. Do you know their names?

There was Lena, and Hattie, William John, Arthur, Spillman, William Henry, Lila, Miriam, Thomas and Joseph. My father was William Henry.

H. Did your parents ever tell you stories about your grandparents?

Well, not particularly, except that they were a mining family and lived in Gold Hill in the Crown Point Ravine which was just in back of the Crown Point mine and mill. These people were very humble people, but they had a great talent for singing as all the Welch and

the English do. I remember one Christmas, when most of them were still alive, they came to this very house [the Marks's home on C Street], and they sang the Welch songs. It was very beautiful.

Who was the first person in your mother's family to move to the Comstock?

Well, that was my great-grandfather, Patrick King. He came here in the early 1860s as a miner from County Cork in Ireland. He is buried in the Virginia City cemetery—the Catholic cemetery.

When did your great-grandmother King come to Virginia City?

She probably came with Pat King from Ireland in the 1830s.

Did she have a job when she came to Virginia City or did she work at home?

In those days the ladies were strictly at home. None of the ladies worked outside of the home.

What do you know of your great-grandparents on your mother's side of the family?

I have no knowledge of my great-grandparents, but I knew my grandparents very well: Nellie King McCormick and Thomas Francis McCormick.

Could you tell me something about them?

My grandmother was born in Virginia City as Nellie King, grew up here, and went to the Catholic convent—St. Mary's Convent.

Thomas Francis McCormick came here as a miner from Pennsylvania in the 1870s.

He graduated through the ranks on the job to become the superintendent of most of what they called the north end mines—the Con-Virginia, the Ophir and the Union. As superintendent he lived in the Ophir house. A lot of these mining companies had big mansions that they used for the superintendents. For instance there was the Ophir mansion, the Chollar mansion and the Savage mansion. These were all housing for the superintendents and their families in those days.

Which of these mansions are still standing?

The Savage and the Chollar. Incidentally, when President Grant was in Virginia City in 1878 he stayed at the Savage mansion, and he delivered a speech from the balcony of that mansion. I have in my possession at the Crystal Bar one of the street decorations that says “Welcome Grant.”

After many years of mining—when the mines closed down—my grandfather was appointed sheriff of Storey County. He died while he was in that office in 1929.

Did he ever tell you stories about being a sheriff?

Not too much about being sheriff. In those days it was a pretty calm job. There weren't too many problems or anything... one of his problems was with his grandson—myself. I was pestering him in the office one day and he said, “Bill, have I ever showed you the jail?”

I said, “No.”

He said, “Come on, I'm going to show it to you.”

This was about 3:00 in the afternoon; so he put me back in the jail, locked the door and said, “At 5:00 I'll take you home.” [laughter]

I suppose that diverted you from making any mistakes in the future? [laughter]

No, but I didn't bother him much after that.

Was the sheriff's office located in the same place it is now?

Oh yes, in the Storey County Courthouse on B Street between Union and Taylor.

Is there another relative on your mother's side of the family that you would like to tell us about?

Yes. My grandmother's uncle was Bishop Hughes who was a bishop of the Diocese of New York City. During his tenure as bishop the very famous St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City was built.

I know that you have always been interested in the social life of Virginia City, and that you have in your possession a city directory dating from the nineteenth century. By referring to it and drawing from your own experiences and what you remember from conversations you have had with residents of Virginia City, could you tell us something about the various religious organizations that were in Virginia City at that time?

Well, the 1878 city directory is a listing of all the heads of families and of people that lived here in those days. [It also has] a sketch of the history of the Comstock and the organizations that were here—the churches, the social and secret organizations, the mines on the Comstock and who ran them, the political offices and everything else.

[According to this directory] the churches that were listed in Virginia City, Nevada, were...the First Baptist Church. It was located

on South C Street—the main street of Virginia City. There was [also] St. Paul's Episcopal Church on F and Taylor streets. This little church was built after the fire and is still active—they still have services there. But the unique thing is that it was structured with wooden pegs. Also unique is that the organ in the church is powered by water—a very unique organ and a very beautiful church [with] Gothic architecture. Another was the Continental M. E. which is located on D and Taylor streets. It was probably a small congregation that disappeared.

Then there was the First Presbyterian Church—a little wooden church on the main street of Virginia City. It is a very beautiful little church and is still very active. They have their pastor and their services there every Sunday. It survived the fire of 1875.

And of course, St. Mary's in the Mountains, the Catholic church, was rebuilt 3 times. A little bit of history about that...I'm sure St. Paul's Episcopal was rebuilt after the big fire of 1875, but before the 1875 fire St. Mary's was built twice and destroyed. The present structure was built in 1875. It is very active. They have mass there regularly, and we have a resident pastor in Virginia City.

There was also the First Liberal Religious Society of Nevada. That was another breakaway church of some kind that probably didn't last long in Virginia City.

Do you have any idea where that was located?

No, I don't—and it is not listed in the book. They probably had their services in the Odd Fellows building or the Masonic building.

In Gold Hill, Nevada, there was St. John's Episcopal Church and St. Patrick's Catholic Church.

Also associated with the Catholic church in Virginia City was St. Mary's Hospital. This was a brick structure built down in the lower eastern part of Virginia City. It had 3 wards that would accommodate 50 people and also private rooms. There was also the Nevada Orphan Asylum for females. This asylum and the hospital were run by the Sisters of Charity in the Catholic church. They also had the St. Mary's Convent at which my grandmother, Nellie King, went to school. [While] there she worked on some of the tapestries that are on exhibit in St. Mary's Church today.

You stated that the Sisters of Charity ran all of these organizations. Do you know who the Catholic priest was in Virginia City when these organizations were founded?

Well, of course, in the early days it was Father Manogue [who later became] Bishop Manogue in Sacramento, California.

I understand that there were many secret societies in Virginia City during the 1870s. Could you tell us about some of those?

Yes. During those days the Masonic Lodge was quite active; they had several organizations in Virginia City and Gold Hill.

Could you tell me where the Masonic Lodge met?

Well, in those days they had their own building in Virginia City. It was built in 1875. Where they met before that I can't tell you. The building itself has been destroyed and is gone. It was located on the main street between Sutton Avenue and Union Street.

Do you remember what it looked like?

Yes. It was a 2-storey structure, a brick building [with] kind of a masonite finish on the front end. They had their large meetings upstairs; they had some very beautiful furnishings upstairs. The furnishings were later removed before the building was destroyed and are now part of the Masonic Lodge in Reno, Nevada, located on First and Virginia streets. Downstairs was a social hall, and that was used for gatherings, for banquets, for their drills—these people had their own drills—and that sort of thing. It was a very impressive structure and occupied a lot from C Street to B Street with about a hundred foot frontage on the main street here in Virginia City.

The Masonic Lodge had several different types of organization here in Virginia City. They had the Grand Lodge of Nevada; Virginia City Lodge No. 3, which had 215 members; the Escorial Lodge No. 3, they had 147 members; and the Grand Chapter of the Royal Archmasters. They [also] had the Virginia City Chapter No. 2, which had 115 members; the Knight Templars No. 1, which was number one in the state of Nevada; and they had the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of freemasonry—it was called the Silver Lodge of Perfection No. 1.

And they all met in the Masonic Hall after it was built?

Well, not necessarily. I wouldn't say that because we're talking about 1878, and a lot of these organizations used other halls. Each organization kind of helped the others out.

In Gold Hill there was the Gold Hill Chapter No. 8 of the Free and Accepted Order of Masons and the Silver Star No. 5. Now these were the 2 largest that were located in Gold Hill, Nevada. In Gold Hill there is a monument that has been erected right next

door to the Gold Hill Hotel. This gives some of the history of the lodges in Gold Hill, Nevada. Silver City had their own lodge, and they still meet there in Silver City.

Could you tell us of some of the other social organizations existent during the early days of the Comstock?

In Virginia City there was also the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. They also had their Grand Lodge in Nevada here. And then they had what they called the Mt. Davidson Lodge No. 3. It had 110 members and was organized in 1862. Then there was the Nevada Lodge No. 7 [with] 132 members, started in 1864; the Virginia City Lodge No. 10 had 124 members, started in 1865; and the Olive Branch Lodge No. 12, started in 1867. Then there was the Colfax Rebekah Degree Lodge No. 1. That was organized in 1869. There was also the Pioneer Encampment No. 1 and the Silver State Encampment No. 7.

Now the Odd Fellows in Gold Hill had the Wilkey Lodge No. 1, the Parker Lodge No. 13, and the Paiute Encampment No. 13.

Is the Odd Fellows building still standing?

Yes, and at the present time the Odd Fellows building is used by the Masonic organizations that are still active here in Virginia City and also by the Rebekahs. They all have their activities here, and they meet regularly. This is where they meet now—above Grandma's Fudge.

Incidentally, Grandma's Fudge has just completed a panoramic view on the south side of their building. It depicts the International Hotel and covers the whole south end of the building. It is very beautiful and very impressive. It shows the windows, the doors, the whole thing, and it's an asset to Virginia

City—so much better than a plain little stucco wall. It's very nice.

Was there more you wanted to tell us about the societies?

Well, yes. The Knights of Pythias were also in Virginia City, and they had their Grand Lodge of the State of Nevada here. They had had Nevada Lodge No. 1, the first lodge in Nevada. It was organized in 1873. They [also] had the Lincoln Lodge No. 6 in 1874, and the Gold Hill Knights of Pythias had the Mystic Lodge No. 3.

Also in Virginia City there was the Improved Order of Red Men. They had their Grand Council of the State of Nevada [here], and they had the Pocahontas Tribe—which was organized in 1871. In Gold Hill they had the Improved Order of Red Men Society, and it was called the Apache Tribe No. 6.

As a little bit of an aside, all the organizations had their own section of the cemeteries in Virginia City and Gold Hill, and the Red Men had their own in the Virginia City cemetery. They were all fenced off separately. They are still used by the way. Anybody that dies and wants to be buried here can still be buried in Virginia City.

The Irish were very prominent here in Virginia City, and they had their organization. It was called the Ancient Order of Hibernians. Gold Hill also had their own Ancient Order of Hibernians, and I'm sure it was very active

Do you know where they met?

They met in the different organization buildings and public buildings in Virginia City. They all had to share, so to speak.

There was also a Jewish organization: the Independent Order of B'nai B'rith. That was Nevada Lodge No. 52. There was also

an order called the Independent Order of Good Templars, and this was Excelsior Lodge No. 7. Another one that surprised me was the Independent Champions of the Red Cross. They had 2: Comstock Encampment No. 3 and the Welcome Band of Hope. That completes the list of secret societies that were in Virginia City and Gold Hill.

[Mr. Marks consults his notes.] Now, what is listed next in the old directories are the miscellaneous societies. These were the public societies: the Exempt Virginia Fire Association established in 1876; the Mechanics Union of Virginia City; the United Mechanics in Gold Hill, Nevada; the Nevada State Medical Society; and the Order of Union and Confederates Veterans organized in 1876. This was a surprise to me—that they would join Union and Confederate.

Then there was the Pacific Coast Pioneers. This was established in 1872 and was a satellite of the California organization. I have a picture in the bar of the early members of that organization.

There was the Virginia Caledonian Club. This was organized in 1873 by Scottish people. The organization was to preserve the traditions of Scotland—their dances, their rituals, their songs—anything that had to do with the Scottish people that were in Virginia City, Nevada.

The next one [listed in the 1878 city directory] was a very strong organization—the Virginia City Miners' Union established in 1867. In 1878 they had a membership of 2,258 members.

Did your grandfather or great-grandfather belong to that?

I'm sure my grandfather, Tom McCormick, belonged to that one. In Gold Hill they had the miners' union that my grandfather Marks

belonged to. They had a membership of 1,800. They were the largest organizations of any on the Comstock.

Has your family preserved any stories about the miners' union?

Not especially, except that they were very active, and they worked for the miners. The Miners' Union Hall in Virginia City still stands, and at the present time it is used by the Eagles Lodge as their meeting place. Downstairs is rented out for commercial purposes. In my earlier years, growing up here through the University of Nevada, they had a mining and history library on the main floor of the Miners' Union Hall. I don't know what ever happened to all the books and everything that were in there. But there was a man by the name of William Moran—a surveyor here—that was kind of a caretaker of that building during those days.

Virginia City also had a social club, the Washoe Club. This was established in 1875. They had their meeting place up above the Crystal Bar. This was where all the big shots gathered [and] were entertained. They [played] cards and gambled. I have in my possession the register that was used for registering guests. It includes such signatures as those of Sherman and Sheridan, the Civil War generals. This organization fell apart after the turn of the century—after 1900.

There was also the Washoe Typographical Union No. 65. Now, this was one of the first typographical organizations in the state. In the state printer's office you will find some very good information on this with some plaques and stuff that they had. One of our old favorites from Virginia City was the state printer for many years, a man by the name of Joe Farnsworth—quite a colorful character and very interesting. He knew everybody in

the state of Nevada by their first name. He was born and raised in Virginia City.

Another organization that I can't tell you anything about was called the Virginia Turn-verin—it sounds a little Irish. I don't know anything about it. One that will surprise you—it did me—was the Gold Hill Literary Society flow about that? [laughter] Now, that's just about all I can give you on the [religious] organizations, secret societies and miscellaneous organizations in Virginia City.

Thank you very much for sharing this information with us. We have been talking about Virginia City in the 1870s. Now, why don't we discuss Virginia City during your parents' time. Let's start by talking about your father. When and where was he born?

My father, William Henry Marks, was born in Gold Hill—the Crown Point Ravine—9 April 1885. He went to the Gold Hill school that burned down in a fire in 1941.

Can you describe that building?

It was a very nice building. There were 2 buildings really, and they were both about 2 storeys. They were spread out over a frontage of approximately 300 feet. It had a brick foundation, old potbellied stoves and outside accommodations for the kids.

Did the Gold Hill school include all of the grades?

Yes, the first through the eighth. [Then] the high school kids went to Virginia City, the Fourth Ward School.

[My father] graduated from the eighth grade. He went to work in the Crystal Bar in 1901 at the age of 17, and that was the only job he ever had. He went to work there in 1901,

and in 1914 he bought it through the estate of Cornelius “Con” Ahern. He operated the bar until he died in 1955. During the Prohibition years he made it a soft drink parlor, and after 1925 or 1926 he succumbed to a little bit of bootlegging. He did that until it was made legal in 1932 or 1933—along in there.

When he first went to work one of his jobs was to clean the gold chandeliers in the bar—clean out the chimneys, fill the oil and that type of thing. He also learned to prepare and put on the free lunch that was typical of the saloons in the early days.

So there was such a thing as a free lunch in Virginia City?

You bet there was. My father prepared the food for it. As a matter of fact, he taught my mother all about cooking from his experiences putting together the free lunch in the Crystal Bar.

Over the years, as you observed your father run the Crystal Bar, did you notice a change in the composition of its clientele?

Sure. Through the early days when I was a small boy— and before my time—it was strictly a man’s bar, and ladies were not allowed in the bar.

Of course, everything was much cheaper in those days. You could get a drink for what they called “a bit” or 2 for a quarter. They used to buy their liquor in barrels. Then they would blend their own. They would mix it up and make their own combinations of flavors to suit the clientele that came into the bar. In those days they had spittoons up and down the front of the bar and little white towels that they hooked onto each section of the bar, so when the miners came in and had a drink they could spit their tobacco and wipe their mouths on

the towel. They used to change these once a day—every morning. My dad would set these spittoons out on the sidewalk every morning and flush it down the street. This wasn’t a very pleasant job, but that was his job. He used to walk up from Gold Hill in the morning to work, walk home for lunch, come back and finish his shift. It was about a 12-hour shift in those days— it wasn’t an 8-hour shift. You worked till you were through.

What period is this we are talking about?

The period I’m talking about is anytime between 1901 and 1920—later than that—1930 really. Then after 1930 the outside people discovered Virginia City—I guess you’d call them tourists in those days. At that time there weren’t too many bars in Virginia City. During the early 1930s there was only the Old ’62, the Crystal Bar, the Smokery—that’s the Delta now—and the Old Timers Club at the other end of town. It’s a nice little restaurant now. There weren’t too many, maybe we skipped 2 or 3—not because I want to but because I can’t remember their names. Oh, there was also the Sawdust Corner. There weren’t very many saloons in those days.

You said that in the 1930s people discovered Virginia City. Why do you think that was so?

Well, it was a change in time. It was a change in Virginia City’s history. Mining was at a low ebb—although in the 1930s most of the big mines were still operating, but on a smaller scale. The outside people began to discover the history of Virginia City. My dad spent hours talking to people. He was a great one to do that. If you came in the bar you had to wait for him to wait on you—if he was talking to somebody. He used to use his old directories and the history books that we have

and spent a great deal of time explaining and talking to people about the history of Virginia City.

Could you tell us some of the history of the Crystal Bar?

The Crystal Bar was established in 1867. The original owner was Grant Israel. Then there was Cornelius “Con” Ahern, my father, and myself. My father went to work for Con Ahern in 1901. Con Ahern was an interesting character in his own right. He ran for surveyor general of the state of Nevada and won the election in 16 counties but was defeated in Nye and Tonopah, and lost the election! This was in the 1800s. Con Ahern was also one of the founders of the Eagles Lodge of the state of Nevada. He was an Irishman with an Irish brogue. My dad thought that the world rose and set on Con Ahern. [He was] very considerate of people and kids. He just loved life. He was born in Ireland. He died in 1914. That was when my father bought the bar through the estate of Con Ahern.

Through the years we met many interesting people in the Crystal Bar. One I recall very well was Will Rogers. He was here once, and [then] he came back with a friend. They tried to get into the opera house. The opera house was closed but there was a window on the side.... So, Will Rogers was climbing through this window [when] the caretaker—one of the last of the bare-fisted fighters, Dan Connors—saw Rogers going through this window. He came down from his home, pulled Rogers out of the window, gave him hell, found out who he was and then got the key and took him through the opera house!

Could you tell me of other people who visited the Crystal Bar through the years?

I’ll mention some of the early people that were in the Crystal Bar and who signed the Washoe Club register. There was William Tecumseh Sherman and William Sheridan, 2 of the famous Civil War generals, and President Grant. Then in 1878 Thomas A. Edison [signed our register]. Before he died in 1929 my father wrote to Edison and asked him to confirm his signature. I have a copy of that letter opened in the book [at the Crystal Bar]. He confirms his visit here and says he enjoyed Virginia City and this type of thing. These are just 4 names that come to my mind of the early day famous people who were here. Now, all these people who came to the club had to be introduced by a member of the club. Of course, the names of John W. Mackay and James Fair are all through the register—they introduced the people.

Now, this was the Washoe Club?

This was the Washoe Club. This was the men’s club that was located above the Crystal Bar. All the people who were important in those days and came to Virginia City were entertained in this club—and all their signatures are in the book.

There are a lot of English financiers in the register [but] the names don’t mean anything to me. [When] Adolph Sutro tried to promote his tunnel he had a great many problems financing his project. So he went to England, met a lot of English financiers, and [persuaded them to finance the Sutro Tunnel]. As a result he completed the tunnel in 1878. This was a very important project, but it came a little bit late for the big mining days. By 1878 and 1880 mining was deteriorating. It’s too bad he didn’t do it in the earlier days because the mines might have gone deeper than they did. The deepest mine was 3,800 feet—this was in the Combination Shaft located in the southeast part of town.

Water and ventilation were problems in the mines. Is that why you wish the tunnel would have been built earlier in the history of the Comstock?

Yes. The mines in the lower levels were extremely hot—you could cook an egg on the rocks in the lower levels of the Virginia City mines; they were that hot—and the water came up to the 1,700 foot level of the mines of Virginia City. Now, the Sutro Tunnel was designed to carry the water out of the lower levels to the town of Sutro; then it was distributed down in the valley east of Dayton, Nevada. The tunnel itself started in the Dayton area—in the valley—and extended west into the Comstock for 4 miles. It hit the Comstock mines on the 1,700 foot level and then had 2 laterals: one went to the mines on the north end of town, and one went to the mines on the south end of Virginia City and in Gold Hill.

Now, below the 1,700 foot level they used Cornish steam pumps to pump water up to the 1,700 foot level. The Sutro Tunnel itself had 2 big wooden tubes that were held together with iron belts. These tubes or pipes went from the mines of Virginia City to the entrance of the Sutro Tunnel in the valley.

After Adolph Sutro left Virginia City he went to California and later became mayor of San Francisco. He lived there (all people are familiar with the Sutro Baths at the beach) and his descendents still have property there. At the present time a financial firm under the name of Sutro is still in existence.

A lot of the people that made their money here lived in San Francisco. Of the 4 bonanza kings that we speak of in the early days—Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien—Flood and O'Brien spent very little time on the Comstock. They did all their manipulations through the stock market. Of course, in San

Francisco you have the Flood building, and you have the Fairmont Hotel—that was one of Fair's enterprises. I don't know of anything in San Francisco that would perpetuate O'Brien's name, [but] he made a lot of money here in Virginia City. Of course, the railroad people (the Sanfords and people like that) made a lot of money here. [Also] associated with the Comstock was [George] Hearst, who perhaps made his first million dollars here. Sharon was active in the mines here and made a tremendous amount of money, and Ralston, the banker. There is a book written about him called *Ralston's Ring*. It is a very interesting book on the history of the Comstock.

Just to mention Mackay again; he established the Mackay School of Mines through his finances, and it was through the finances of Mackay that the Atlantic cable was laid. I don't know if it's still worthwhile, but in those days it was a big link between the United States and the European countries.

So Mackay and the people you just mentioned probably visited the Crystal Bar in the early days. Before we go on were there others who visited the bar through the years that you would like to tell me about?

Well, through the years the Crystal Bar has been blessed with many visitors. Herbert Hoover was here in 1933 or 1934—just after he was defeated for president by Franklin Roosevelt. With him was his secretary of state, Ogden Mills. Ogden Mills's father was one of the founders and organizers of the Virginia & Truckee Railroad. They [Hoover and Mills] came to Virginia City on the railroad. We have pictures of them on the platform on the back of the train. They came to the Crystal Bar—they were brought there [by some of the railroad people]. At the time the man who was in charge of the railroad here was an old

timer—born and raised in Virginia City—Len Gallagher. He was a one-armed man. He lost his arm in the service of the Virginia & Truckee Railroad here in Virginia City. Ogden Mills and Herbert Hoover came to the Crystal Bar. My father had his old Washoe Club register out, and they signed the book. But Mrs. Hoover was part of the entourage and very much opposed to saloons—so we did not get a picture of Herbert Hoover in the Crystal Bar. She [warded] off all of the photographers!

All right, so Herbert Hoover was here in the 1930s, and in the earlier days President Grant was here and President Garfield—I don't know if I mentioned him. They were the 3 presidents that were here. And when we [Virginia City] had our centennial in 1959, Vice-president Nixon came to Virginia City on a helicopter and gave a speech in a public plot here in the middle of town. His signature and his wife Pat's are also in the book. Incidentally, Pat Nixon was a native Nevadan born in Ely, Nevada.

Now, let's see.... During the 1930s—the early 1930s—Charles Lindbergh had just completed his one-way trip from the United States to Europe on his “Spirit of St. Louis.” He was touring the United States, and he came to Reno with his airplane. At that time he wouldn't sign a signature to anything. But my father took his old book to Reno—to the Riverside Hotel—and the man who was the manager of the hotel at that time (a good friend of my father's) approached Lindbergh and said, “This is one book that you will have to put your signature in.” So he acquiesced, and as a result, we have Charles A. Lindbergh's signature in this old book of ours.

I started a later book myself—the Crystal Bar Register. The first name in that book is Ty Cobb—the immortal baseball player. At one time he was living at Lake Tahoe—he had his home up there—and he often used to come

to Virginia City. We got friendly, so as time wore on, he would tell his family, “You go see Virginia City. I'm going to sit here and talk with Bill.” What a guy. I loved old Ty Cobb.

I met him in Reno one night in a little outside casino, and we were doing a little bit of gambling. I was betting a dollar or 2—Ty was betting a lot more—and he followed my bets. I lost maybe \$20, and he lost maybe \$1,000. But, we were still friends, even after that. [laughter]

Other names in my book include Irving Berlin—he was married to one of the Mackay descendants. Their daughter was here at the time to get a divorce, so he visited her in Reno. She was later Eleanor Hawkins. As we [Mr. Marks and Mr. Berlin] were sitting there at the bar and were talking [I remembered] in my World War II footlocker upstairs I had a cancelled ticket from a theater in Naples where he put on the show: *This is the Army*. So I went upstairs, got this little ticket, brought it down and showed it to him. He was quite thrilled to see that, so on the back of it he wrote down, “We meet again in Virginia City.”

I also have Max Baer and Buddy Baer, 2 fighters, and Joe Dimaggio. He was here during the war years when he was trying to have a reconciliation with his wife. He and my father got quite friendly. He came back to Virginia City, and he had his young son Joe and his family. It was nice meeting him again.

Also in the book is Charles Laughton, a very famous actor, and Jimmy Stewart. Eleanor Roosevelt was here with Lord Halifax during World War II. They had just come from the Lockheed plant in Los Angeles where the thousandth B-26 bomber had just come off the line to go to England. I was working at Lockheed at the time. They took us all off of the lines to go out and see the takeoff of this thousandth bomber. Lord Halifax gave a speech—they were selling bonds and so

forth. Then they came to Virginia City. He and Eleanor came to the Crystal Bar, and her signature is in the book—my father was there.

Clark Gable was here when he was filming *The Misfits* in Dayton, Nevada. He came to Virginia City and signed the register. In the earlier days during the 1930s Gloria Stewart and Fibber Magee and Mollie came into the bar. They were sitting there and having an old-fashioned till somebody recognized them. Then they took off. The writer of their stories, Phil Leslie, was here with his sweetheart.

When we had the premiere of the movie, *Virginia City*, Errol Flynn and Miriam Hopkins were the stars, and they were here. May Robson, Tom Mix and all those people were all in to the bar, and we have all of their signatures. And before he was very famous at all Ronald Reagan and his girlfriend, Jane Wyman, were visitors to Virginia City. My wife has a little story about them. Also, Ferde Grofe, the composer of the “Grand Canyon Suite,” was here. When she was a young mother, Shirley Temple sat at the bar with her baby. She took the hot water from my faucet, put it in a milkshake mixer, heated her bottle and sat there and fed the bottle to the baby.

We had what we called the Bonanza Day here one time. I happened to be the master of ceremonies for the program. That was when “Bonanza” was popular. All of the men from “Bonanza” were here: Lorne Greene, Dan Blocker, Michael Landon and the whole works. Grant Sawyer was the governor of the state at that time, and he was here. It took him about 3 hours to go from the Fourth Ward School to the depot before we could introduce these people. There was such a crowd they just wouldn’t let him through the town. After that was over they [the men from “Bonanza”] came up and fraternized with people and visited all of the place.

Then General Mark Clark was here after World War II in 1946. At that time he commanded the Sixth Army which was located in San Francisco. He came up to inspect the Nevada National Guard. Mr. Sheeh, the warden of the prison, was an old-time Virginia City man born and raised here. He brought Mark Clark up here. I was the commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, so I showed him around the town and acted as escort. Naturally I brought him into the Crystal to sign the register. The head of the state police at that time, Les Moody, was in charge of the security for Mark Clark when he was here.

As I recall there was also Rosemary Clooney and Dennis Day.... A little interesting story about Dennis Day. Margaret [Mrs. Marks] and I went to see his show in Reno. He was playing at the Riverside Hotel. After the show we were standing outside of the hotel getting ready to go home. Then we saw Dennis and his bandleader, Mr. Johnson I think his name was, and said how much we enjoyed his show. Then we decided to go to the Mapes, and as we were coming out of the Mapes Dennis and his bandmaster came by, and we said hello to him again. They were taking a little tour around town!

Well, the next day they came to Virginia City and into the Crystal Bar and signed the book for us. I said, “I don’t know if you remember or not, but last night we saw you as you came out of the Riverside, and we told you how much we enjoyed the show. Then later we saw you just as you were coming out of the Mapes.” He said, “Oh, that’s all right, maybe you just had to go to the toilet!” [laughter]

The Crystal Bar sounds like it has been a very busy place over the years. Could you describe it to us?

All of the old fixtures are still on display in the bar: the 2 back bar fixtures, the 2 small chandeliers each with 4 lamps on it and the chandelier itself. There are 5 pieces to the chandelier and it has 18 kerosene lamps. It is gold-plated, and the crystals are imported from Czechoslovakia. The chandeliers were used first for kerosene, then gas, then electricity.

Some of the old glassware that was used in the bar is on display there. The glassware comes mostly from Bohemia—very fine crystal—and the vases are made of fine crystal. A few pieces have been added to our collection from private donations. Some date back over 200 years. One of my favorite glasses belonged to Samuel Chase—one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

In the bar itself we have some very fine pictures of the old mines here in Virginia City. The biggest mine was the Con-Virginia which produced over \$180 million in gold and silver. There is a picture of that mine in the bar. It burned in 1941.

I assume the tastes of your customers in the Crystal Bar changed over the years. Could you tell me what kinds of drinks were served in the Crystal Bar—first in the 1920s, then in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s?

The Crystal Bar has always been famous for its mixed drinks. My father was one of the finest bartenders the state of Nevada ever knew. He worked closely with another famous bartender, Walter Drysdale. Everything was made to perfection. It had to be right—there were no guns or anything. We still carry on that tradition and mix all the hard drinks from what we call “scratch.” We’re kind of famous for some of our mixed drinks: our fizzes, our mint juleps and that type of thing.

After 1918, during the years of Prohibition, my father made a soft drink parlor out of the Crystal Bar—it was the Crystal Saloon in those days. So he had a full line of ice cream sodas, milk shakes, sundaes and ice cream cones. One of the things he sold in the bar (an old-time Nevadan would recognize the name) was Bellos. Bello was a Reno firm that made chicken tamales. He used to heat [them] on a little stove at the end of the bar, and they were famous. [He also sold] candies. He used to buy his candies and chocolates in individual boxes. We still have some of the old candy counter plates and jars that he kept his candy in. He had a little room in the front of the bar in those days where the kids would come in to get their ice cream and their candies.

As time wore on in the 1920s my dad did start to do a little bootlegging, which was illegal, but everybody else was doing it, and so he got in on the act too. In those days there weren’t too many mixed drinks...a highball. A highball glass was a very little one so it could be disposed of quickly in case of a visit from the federal authorities. A horse’s neck was another popular drink. That was kind of a soft drink, [but] you could add a little brandy to it. It was a twist of lemon in the bottom of a stem glass filled with ginger ale and then topped off with a little bit of brandy. They also had martinis, old-fashioneds and whiskey sours. The old-fashioned is still a very popular drink as is the martini. The recipe has changed a little bit because of the taste of the public at the present time.

During the winter months a popular drink was the hot toddy—made with hot water, sugar and a little brandy or a little bourbon, topped off with a little bit of nutmeg. My father had his own special recipe for the Tom and Jerry. I still use it today, and the batter is my secret—that I don’t divulge. It’s a hot drink served in a cup, and it’s made with bourbon

or brandy. It's a very tasty drink, and people still come to the Crystal for our old-fashioned Tom and Jerry drinks.

In those days, as I said, there weren't too many mixed drinks. We didn't have the tourists in those days. It was strictly the local clientele—strictly the men. The ladies were not allowed in the bar in the 1920s. They weren't allowed in the bar until the 1930s. On Saturday night, dance night, the ladies would come up during intermission for a little drink. They used to sit in the stairway alongside of the bar to have their drink because they couldn't come into the bar to get it. But they had their libation and went back and had their dances. During intermission the local men would come up town to have a few snorts of corn, so to speak. In those days, because it was Prohibition, they would hide their bottles in the car behind the upholstery or wherever and sneak out when they got hot, overworked or over tired and refresh themselves.

Then comes 1930 when under the direction of President Roosevelt the Eighteenth Amendment was repealed first of all just for beer and wine and then it was extended to the hard-liquor drinks. During the mid-1930s the tourists started to arrive on the Comstock. The drinking habits of the American public were changing. They were asking for more types of drinks, and the ladies started coming into the bar. They had to put stools in the bar so the ladies could sit down. And they drank their collinses, their daiquiris, their bacquardis, and you name it, all the old-fashioned drinks. My dad started out with his famous fizzes: the Bonanza and the Comstock Lode —secret ingredients again. To this day they are very popular, and people keep returning to the bar to have these drinks. Of course, during the summertime the most famous drink that we make is the mint julep. It's an excellent

drink, and I hope that you'll have one before you leave Virginia City. It's another bar recipe that a lot of people would love to have. It's highly recommended all over the country even by people from the deep South. They say it's the best one they've ever tasted. It isn't nice to say that. Some people would disagree, but I have a 99 percent record of approval on that.

My friend Evelyn says I should try your mint julep. [laughter] Did other drinks become popular in later years?

Oh, yes, there were others. Vodka became popular during the 1950s. The vodka people put on quite a promotional advertising campaign featuring the Moscow mule, the vodka collins and the other vodka drinks that they have today. The Moscow mule is beginning to come back. It is served in a copper cup with lime, ginger beer and vodka.

I know that a major change in your clientele over the years has been the inclusion of women. Were there other changes in your clientele?

[Well we moved] from miners and local people to tourists and then back to tourists and local people. In later years Margaret and I have come to depend a lot on local trade. We're quite active in supporting all the local projects— particularly basketball. Some of our championship balls are on display in the bar. Our town has been very fortunate in having some great basketball teams through the years.

Thank you for giving us this history of the Crystal Bar. Of course, after 1901 the history of the Crystal Bar parallels your father's life. But I do have a final question I would like you

to answer about your father; then we will talk about you mother. Did your father join any social clubs in Virginia City?

The only things my father ever belonged to were the Eagles Lodge and the Elks (Reno Lodge No. 597). My mother's father and his brother were charter members of the Elk's Lodge in Reno.

Did your father and his other adult friends in Virginia City spend their leisure time at any one spot in the community?

Not to my knowledge. They worked so many long hours in those days that by the time they finished they probably went home. I'm sure he had some outside activities, but I think they were limited, and he never spoke of them very much.

Let's talk about your mother. When and where was your mother born?

My mother was born in Virginia City 5 May 1896.

Was she born at home?

Yes.

Do you know who the doctor was?

No. I don't.

Where did your mother go to school?

She went to Virginia City schools, and then after high school she went to San Francisco to a business college.

What did your mother do after going to business school?

She returned to Virginia City and married my father. She never held a position of any kind as a business woman or anything else, but she did help my father out in the bar and the soft drink parlor all through her years.

Where did your mother buy her groceries when you were growing up?

There were 2 stores here that were very popular, Sam Mariani's and George Wilson's. She did most of her shopping with George Wilson.

Where were these 2 stores located?

Sam Mariani's store was located where the Long Branch Saloon is now. Wilson's store, called N.C. Prater's at the time, was located next door to what is now the Sundance Saloon.

George Wilson's was an old-fashioned grocery store. He had a great big block of yellow cheese in the back—we used to open it up and cut it off—and he had cookie jars and those types of things. And he used to sell coal oil and deliver it to people in a 5-gallon can with a potato on the top so it wouldn't spill out before we delivered it.

When I was growing up I used to deliver groceries for N.C. Prater's with a horse and wagon—during the winter months on a sleigh. After school I used to go get the groceries and then deliver by sections of the town: the south end, the west end, the north end, down the hill. George always used to tell me: "Hurry up Bill, but don't run the horses!" He didn't pay us much, but he would always give us a cookie or an apple after work...50¢ an hour I think he gave us, or something like that.... We got to take the horses up to the barn which was located on C Street—water them, feed them, curry them a little bit and put them out to pasture.

George Wilson was quite a character in Virginia City. George was careless with his money. He used to hide it sometimes. One time he hid it in some trash in his office, and he threw it all in the stove and burned it up!

In those days people didn't pay cash. Everything was credit so you had to be careful of all the tags when you made deliveries—that you had the right name and the right amount. Sometimes these bills got astronomical, but most of the time George got all his money. People were honest. When they got to payday they would come in and pay their grocery bills.

Where did your mother buy her clothes?

My mother was pretty fussy about clothes, and she used to order all of her clothes from stores in San Francisco. This caused a little hassle between Mother and Dad because he didn't like the San Francisco stores. But Mother was very petite and particular and bought from the White House, the Emporium and the City of Paris. She would order dresses or coats, and they would send up nearly half a dozen in a box. She would try them on, pick what she wanted and those she didn't want she would send back. This is how she did most of her clothes buying.

Were there other kinds of stores that your family frequented while you were growing up?

Oh, we had grocery stores. We had our clothing stores here where I bought things, and we had Chinese laundries that we used.

Can you remember the name and location of the Chinese laundries?

The Chinese laundry that I remember was on the corner of Sutton and C streets where

the Assay Office is located now. The fellow that ran it was a great big tall Chinaman by the name of Hun Yun. He was good with the kids. We used to tease him and he would get mad at us, but he always had Chinese candy he gave to all the kids.

And then there were some Chinese restaurants we used to patronize, [like] Charlie Ching. He was quite a character in town here. We used to walk by and say, "How's everything today, Charlie?"

And he would say, "Oh, everything is way up in G."

I remember eating dinner there one night during the 1930s when a famous coach from USC was having dinner there.

Where was Charlie Ching's restaurant?

It was where the Delta gift shop is now.

Another Chinese man here made very good pies: Charlie Sam. That was where a lot of the local miners used to eat. It was located where the Silver Queen is now. Then, on the street below was a Chinese clothing store and bar run by a fellow by the name of Chung Kee. The men from the Con-Virginia mine used to come up the hill—up Union Street—and go in there to have a drink after they got through work. They called it the Great Chung Kee liner—that was a shot [of whiskey] and a little beer. That's known now as a boilermaker, but in those days, it was the Chung Kee liner.

A little later people by the name of Chinghi had that same place. Raymond Chinghi was Margaret's age. He went to school with us, and at the present time he's a dentist in the Oakland area. Let's see, what else was in town here? They had their own bakeries here.

Do you remember one?

One was run by a fellow by the name of Ray Peek. It was called the City Bakery. This was located where the little mall is between Union and Taylor streets.

Can you remember how it looked from the outside?

Oh, just probably a front door and 2 big glass windows. Let's see, what else did we have here? There was a fellow up the street from the Crystal on the next block by the name of Harry Beck. He was located just this side [the north side] of where the Tahoe House is now. His store had everything imaginable. I guess you could call it a five and dime in those days. To get through the store you had to walk through aisles.... I don't mean laid out aisles. You went in a zig-zag wherever Harry had his stuff packed.

When he sold his store, underneath all this rubble of knickknacks were some very fine things—7 or 8 rosewood pianos. They went the way of a lot of things in Virginia City. During the 1930s a man came here from Hollywood: Albert Dressler. We called him "the millionaire tramp." He came to Virginia City and cleaned out a lot of the good things including a lot of the things in Harry Beck's store. And right in back of the Crystal was a livery stable with a lot of old hearses, carriages and wagons, everything that went with the livery stable. He bought all this stuff, took it back to Hollywood and sold it to the moving picture people. The town lost a great deal through this man, "the millionaire tramp."

Right in the middle of town where Red's candy store is located now there was a little lady by the name of Mrs. Sheehy. She had a millinery store, and she did millinery work; sewing and what not. Further up the street on the other side of Harry Beck's store was a little lady about 4 feet 6 inches that used to stand on

a little box to wait on you. She had bolts and bolts of beautiful rolled material of all kinds and shoes and stuff like that. [Her name was] Mrs. Eddy. She was an old-time Virginia City lady. When she died the store had all kinds of button shoes, old-time girdles—they didn't call them girdles in those days—corsets and bolts and bolts of beautiful material. She also had a little candy counter, and she used to sell candy to the kids. She would stand up on this little box at noon when we would go in there to buy some candy from her. She was a very nice little lady.

Let's see, what else did we have here? The telephone office was very unique. This was located where the Eilley Orrum is now. During my time a lady by the name of Mrs. Davis and her blind daughter, Susie Davis, operated it. That was the old-time switchboard. The switchboard itself is in the museum in Carson City. It was the old drop [board]. Mrs. Davis and her daughter operated this in conjunction with a little store. They sold stationery, newspapers and this type of thing. Susie Davis was blind, and she could operate this thing [the board]; she knew what everything was just by feel. She taught my friend, Earl Andreasen—he delivered newspapers for her—how to operate the switchboard. I was in there one day when Mrs. Davis said that she had to have such and such a number, and then she began to talk [on the phone] with one of her lady friends. Pretty soon she said, "Earl, are you listening in?"

He said, "No, Ma'am."

She came downstairs, fired Earl and kicked us both out the door! [laughter]

We had another famous old character here during the 1930s: the dentist, Dr. Lawson. He was raised in Silver City. He had several offices here in Virginia City.

[Another character we had here] was the man that ran the drugstore: Paul Coryell. He

was born in Sutro, and as a young man his father told him, “Never, don’t never take a job where you have to take off your hat.” So he ran the drugstore all of his life, and he always wore a little black string tie, a black coat and a big black hat. And he never took off his hat. He was a character.

Virginia City had its characters. There was [a woman] that lived down the hill—her chickens used to sleep in bed with her.... And Adolph Chenette—he was an excellent tin smith but a loner; crabby and hated the kids. He lived by himself. Then there was another one by the name of Con Turner...and Steve Brigant...and Shorty Russell...just to name a few of these people we considered characters during our time.... Let’s see...there was also Archie Monohan. Archie was the janitor at the school. He wasn’t a real character though.... Yes, I guess he was. We used to pull all kinds of tricks on him in the old Fourth Ward School. Then he’d protect us from the principal and the teachers.

Now it sounds as though we’re getting into your own biography, so why don’t we start with when and where you were born, and then I would like you to tell me something about your childhood.

I was born in Virginia City, 17 October 1918 in the Ophir house. This was one of the homes that was set aside for the superintendent of the mine and his family. My doctor was Dr. Hodgins, and a midwife, Mrs. Kenny, helped my mother get me going. I started school in the First Ward School which was located just north of where the gas station is now. My wife, Margaret Kelley Marks, and I started first grade there. Our teacher was Mrs. Katie Quirk who was also a native of Virginia City. The First Ward School accommodated the first 3 grades. Mrs. Quirk was a beautiful little lady—very prompt, petite and a great

teacher. On the way to school every morning when we saw her coming all the kids would run down the hill and whoever got there first would ask for her hand, or walk her home after school, or go get water for her tea. The first day of school she would pull out this razor strap that looked about 5 feet long and give us a little lecture on discipline. Then she would put the strap away in her desk, and we never saw it again for the rest of the year. The way she operated her class was that she had 3 chairs and a bench. The 3 chairs were for the number 1, 2, and 3 students, and the bench was for the rest of us. You started out at the end of the bench, and if number one made a mistake she lost her place, went to the end, and you moved up. You always tried to work your way up to the number one spot on the bench.

And we had a play yard out there that we used to play in.

What kinds of games did the kids play?

Well, one of the games that we played was bean bag.

What is that?

Bean bag was just passing a bag back and forth—trying to get it from one side to the other. We chose up sides. Outside of that we just played out in the school yard.

After [I finished the third grade] I went to the fourth grade and to the Fourth Ward School.

Who were your teachers there?

Oh, I had Mrs. Somers, Mrs. Paar and Mrs. Mosbek in grammar school. In high school I had Mrs. Baldini who is now Mrs. Joe Viani in Hawthorne, Katherine “Tick” Ligon

who is now married to one of the Cantlons in Reno and Helen Stark— we called her “Peaches”—she married a man by the name of Aldaz who died many years ago, but she never remarried.

Then we had Mr. Tapscott, Mr. Gilmartin— John Gilmartin who is deceased—and Jake Lawlor. The complex at the university is named after him. This was Jake Lawlor’s first teaching and coaching job.

He was a basketball coach?

He coached me all through high school.

So you were in high school athletics?

Yes. The only thing we had in those days was basketball. Mr. Lawlor was our coach. In those days we didn’t have zones, and we played Reno, Carson and Fallon—just like we were big shots. In my senior year Carson City defeated us for the state championship, but we were runners-up. That was our first claim to glory in basketball.

Jake was a great coach, a great teacher— quite a psychologist. He could crucify you without saying a word and then praise you the same way—a great man. My all-time favorite man.

Were there any other teachers that you were very fond of?

Well, I loved John Gilmartin, but Jake was my favorite.

What did you and your friends do in high school when you were outside of school?

In those days we had our own little social clubs [with] 3 or 4 cabins we built. One was the North End Society Club, and another was

located down over the hill from my house. The boys from the south end of town had their own organization, too, and we struggled a little and fought for supremacy.. .nothing too serious, but that was the way it was.

Who were the boys in your group? Do you remember any of their names?

Oh, sure. There was all the Colletti boys: Amilio; Eddie, who was J. P. here for many years; Mickey, who was very prominent in the state highway department; and Pete, who is in Hawthorne as a bartender. And there were the Gallagher kids: Hugh, Neil and Merv...and Nick Flinch, Martin Rosso, Earl Andreasen, Fred Andreasen, and the Evans boys. There were a lot of kids, all the north end kids.

What did you and your friends do?

We played baseball, basketball and horseshoes. We also did a little thievery for a chicken or turkey or some other food for our cabin.

Could you describe the location of the cabin used by the North End Society Club?

The cabin of the North End Society Club was located on the corner of Carson Street and A Street. It was the remains of a brick building of some sort. We made a 2-storey cabin out of it. The bottom storey we used for just getting together, and we had a stove and a table in there where we used to play cards. Upstairs we had a little pool table... about 4-by-6-feet—that I brought there, and we used to play pool. We also had a 1,000 watt bulb in the bottom floor that we used to hook on to the power line. The man who was in charge of the power station at that time, Bill Curran, used to come out and try to find out

where the power leakage was coming from. But during the day it wasn't on, and he never came out there during the night—so he never discovered our ploy!

Then we had another cabin located just across the street from that. I guess you would call it a suburb of the North End Society Club. It was located over a tunnel. I remember one day, Lennie James, the sheriff—he was the guy who succeeded my grandfather—was after Amilio Colletti and me for doing something. We saw him coming up the hill toward the cabin to get us. We had a trap door in the cabin that opened up into the tunnel, so we went down through the end of the tunnel, and he never did catch us! [laughter]

And then we had another cabin that was located just over the hill from where the firehouse is. It was a one-storey structure. It had 8-by-8-inch timbers coming out at angles on each corner of the building, so the guys from the south end of town couldn't come down and tip our cabin over. [laughter] They couldn't lift it. We had a basketball court in that one, too, and we used to play ball there. Our mothers used to send down cookies and lemonade and stuff like that to whet our whistles.

The members of the North End Society Club sometimes visited the Old Timers Club run and operated by Jim and Rosie McDevitt on the corner of C Street and Mill Street. They were the old-time Comstockers. Rosie's father was a man by the name of Noce. She was an Italian lady, and Jim was Irish. Rosie's father ran a wood and coal yard here—right across the street from the Old Timers Club which was located where the Miner's restaurant is. In those days it was quite a hangout for all of us kids in the north end. In the evenings we would play games like hide-and-go-seek and kick the can there. The girls participated, too—like the Murry girls, the Evans girls, the

Mariani girls and the Kelley girls. We had a great deal of fun until it got dark and we had to go home.

Before we got into these games we used to play marbles on the other side of the corner. Marbles was a very competitive game in those days. Our ring was only about a foot in diameter. We all had our shooters and put up marbles to play. The miners used to walk from the saloons down to our corner to watch us kids play marbles because it was such a competitive game.

The Evans family also lived on the corner of Mill and C—across the street from the Old Timers Club—and they had an old Model T Ford that we used to run around in. We also had a little shed up in back there where we used to box. It was quite a little hangout for all of us kids in the north end of Virginia City.

Were there dances in Virginia City for the teenagers or other kinds of formal social functions for the young people?

Not just for the young people, but the dances in Virginia City were held mostly in the National Guard Hall—this was where we played basketball, too. Saturday nights was the big night for dancing. We had a local band here made up of people like Vada Greenhalgh, my next door neighbor, and Louie Avansino, Vic Maxwell and Corker Nye, a prospector here. Corker Nye was a fiddler, and Louie Avansino played the drums. They had about a 12-piece band that used to entertain us.

Also during those days we used to bring in a fellow that is familiar to [those who know] Nevada's music history, Tony Pecetti. In later years Pecetti used to bring the big bands into Reno to Tony's El Patio Ballroom. This was located where the Labor Temple is now, on Arlington and Commercial Row. We used to go down there for dances on Saturday. We

used to have dances in the old opera house, too. We also used to have our basketball games up in the old opera house.

And in the National Guard Hall?

And in the National Guard Hall. When we were kids we used to rollerskate in the old opera house—Piper's Opera House.

Were there picnics?

Yes. We had our picnics. We used to go down to the Carson River for picnics and to Bowers Mansion. In those days Bowers Mansion had a little outdoor pavilion with a dance floor on it. We would go down there to swim and go over to the little bar that was located in one of the back rooms of the mansion. The place was operated by a little old fellow by the name of Henry Ritter who was an historian. He lived there. Of course, in those days it had 2 swimming pools: a hot water pool and a cold water pool with a little island in between.

We also used to go to Tahoe for picnics. This was an all-day event, and you planned for something like that. And we used to go to Washoe Lake for picnics....

During the winter months sleigh riding was quite a sport here. We used to have our own individual sleighs, and we used to have what we called bobsleds. Now, a bobsled is a homemade affair. It had a sleigh in the front end bolted to a middle board, and it worked on a swivel so you could steer it. The back end was a permanent sleigh. We would get 8 or 10 boys and girls on this thing and go up to the top of Carson Street, then sled down Carson Street and around through Six Mile Canyon [Street] till the sleigh stopped. Then we would pull that thing back up the hill and down to where the swimming pool is now. We used

to get a bonfire going, and then we'd cook wienies and marshmallows and get warm.

Another sleigh ride we had began at the top of Taylor Street then down between the Catholic and the Presbyterian churches to the hospital. And the third one was down through Gold Hill from the Divide almost to Silver City. That was our winter. In those days we didn't have much in the way of skis except homemade skis with the strap across the top... and God help you if [you] made it, and God damn you if you didn't! [laughter]

Did you go to theaters while you were growing up?

Well, we had one little theater here, and this was where the premiere of *Virginia City* was! That was located where Grandma's Fudge is now—in that part of the Odd Fellow's building. A man from Fallon used to run it. He showed films almost every night. Before we had the films there we used to have them in the old National Guard Hall. I happened to be a ticket taker up there. The little old lady who ran the place wasn't too friendly, but the kids would sneak underneath the ticket window by me, and I'd let them in. She came out one night, looked around, saw all these kids in there and she said, "I haven't taken in that much money, Bill. What's happened?" Well, she figured it out, and I lost my job. [laughter]

Eventually the National Guard Hall was used by the school for all of its activities. This was where we used to put on plays like the Andy Rooney series. It was where we held our graduation exercises and, of course, basketball.

Did the high school have a drama teacher or a drama club that would put on the plays?

Well, during my time it was run by 2 of the teachers I mentioned before: Tick Ligon

and Helen “Peaches” Stark... also Jake Lawlor took part in these things. He hammed it up a little bit. We had a lot of fun putting these things on.

I remember one time we put on what we called a Winter Carnival, and Jake Lawlor was the director. In those days our sweat suits and basketball uniforms [were supposed] to last for many years. One of the scenes in this Winter Carnival was a snow scene, and we boys were all wearing our sweat suits.. first came the water, and then for the snow Jake showered us all with flour. Of course, the flour mixed with the water and got into our sweat suits. Needless to say, the next year we had to have new sweat suits. The [old ones] had become plaster of paris historical monuments. [laughter]

Could you describe the National Guard Hall?

In the earlier days the National Guard Hall was a place strictly for the National Guard—for their exercises, their drills and this type of thing. But during my time it was used as office space. The third storey was vacant. We used to skate up in there, too, as kids. On the second floor was Vincent Nevin and a fellow by the name of Tom Williams—the publisher of the *Virginia City News*. A fellow by the name of W. D. Murray also had an office in there. He was an insurance agent. There were 2 or 3 other offices in there. The bottom floor was the gymnasium.

It was a very impressive structure. It was about 4 storeys high. The basketball floor was more or less sunken between B and C streets. The main floor where we played basketball and where the National Guard did their training was a hardwood floor. The floor itself was set on heavy springs—I have one of them in the Crystal Bar—and they were set in different spots along the 4 walls of the gymnasium.

The floor itself was never tied to the walls. When you danced on there, played basketball or whatever, the floor would bounce like you were bouncing on springs. Sometimes our dances would last to 6:00 in the morning, and when you went home your legs would never be tired because it was always a spring effect. The floor of Piper’s Opera House has the same principle.

[I’d like to tell you] a little side story about the basketball games in the old National Guard Hall. We only had one stove. It was a big old potbellied stove located in the southeast corner of the building. These teams would come up to play in Virginia City, and they would always be leery of this one corner because we weren’t really strictly members of the priesthood or anything like that—if we had the opportunity we would try to nudge the opposing team into the old potbellied stove. We used to call it “the old stove play.”

We have been talking about what you and your friends did as teenagers to entertain yourself. Now, could you describe for us an average day in high school when you were going to the Fourth Ward School?

My average day in high school began when I would leave home about 8:15 in the morning and walk to school. If it was nice weather we would play out in the yards. The boys would play marbles until the bell rang. We went to school from 9:00 until 3:15 with an hour off for lunch. Our curriculum was very standard in those days. We had to take an English course, a Spanish course and 2 years of mathematics: algebra and geometry. Typing was optional as was shorthand. American history, ancient history and civics was necessary. There weren’t too many electives during my time. Before my time they had a printing class, and they had their own printing press upstairs. The

boys were taught the fundamentals of this endeavor, and they were also taught manual training so they could work around the mines in Virginia City. This was an elective that was discontinued before I was in high school. The girls had home economics class during my time. During the winter months we'd go in the basement and prepare a lunch for those of us who wanted it. We paid for it, but it was a lot better than trudging through the snow.

During the winter months we had to leave home a little bit earlier because in those days you didn't have the advantage of the plows—so we had to make our own tracks up to the school. We would get there, be soaking wet, and stand by the old potbellied stove until our pants would dry out, and probably burned our legs in the process. We survived, and that was fun.

While you were in high school did you belong to any social clubs?

The only social club I belonged to was the Catholic organization, the Young Men's Christian Institute. But there were really no social clubs associated with the school in those days.

Were you an officer in the Young Men's Christian Institute?

Yes, I was the secretary.

Do you remember the names of any of the other members of this organization?

There were the Collettis, the Gallaghers and the Elkins.... I can't recall all their names.

We also had the Boy Scouts organization here. We used to meet in the basement of the Episcopal church. Our scoutmaster was a man by the name of Mr. Moler, who was in

charge of the Sierra Pacific Power Company or whatever it was called at that time. He instructed us in scouting. He had 2 sons that lived here I might mention: Murrey and Marvin Moler, who later became quite influential in journalism in the Salt Lake City area. Mr. Moler was killed when he was repairing the telephone pole just back of the old Fourth Ward School. The pole gave way, toppled over and crushed him underneath it as it hit the ground.

Do you remember any of the names of your friends in the Boy Scouts?

They're the same ones that I mentioned elsewhere... plus the Evanses and a few more that we've talked about in our interview.

What did you do after high school?

After high school? Well, the summer after I graduated from high school I worked for the highway department. That was the first real outside job I'd had—besides delivering groceries for George Wilson. Then I went to the University of Nevada and graduated from there in 1941.

While you were at the university, what did you major in?

Well, I started out as a pre-med student, took 3 years of pre-med, changed my mind and graduated in business administration and economics. I was associated with and lived at the Sigma Nu fraternity house for 2 or 3 years, and then I moved to a private residence across the street from the fraternity house. My roommate was a young boy from Fernley by the name of Frank McColloch. [He later] represented *Time* magazine as their editor in several of their national publications. He

went from *Time* to being the editor of the *Los Angeles Times*. Presently he is editor of the *Sacramento Bee*.

What were the names of some of your other college friends?

Well, during those days we had a lot of fellows in the fraternity from Tonopah. Bekos—Bill Beko, the district judge; and Tom, who is a retired, very wealthy man that got into some mining activities during World War II in tungsten. And there were the Barsantis. One of the Barsantis was a general in World War II. In later years he led the First Paratroop Division into Korea. He died of cancer. He had a couple of brothers. One of them is an insurance man in Reno now. Also there were the Creels. These were all Tonopah people I'm speaking of.

From sparks there was this fellow by the name of Jack Streeter, who is a prominent attorney in Reno right now, and Leslie Gray, another prominent attorney. And Bill Beemer, who was a judge in Reno for many, many years. I remember an instance with Bill after the war. I was driving into Reno one night to the tournaments with a careful of kids, and I got stopped for speeding. So I thought, "Well, this won't be a problem; I'll just call Bill in the morning."

So I got home, and the next morning I called Bill and said, "Bill, I just got a ticket last night for going too fast with a carload of kids going into Reno for the basketball game. What am I going to do about it?"

He said, "Willie, just send me \$25." My friend the judge! [laughter]

Were these the state tournaments you were going to?

Yes.

Did Virginia City win?

Oh, yes! Of course.

Do you remember the names of any of your other college friends?

Oh, gosh! You caught me by surprise—at that time the university was only about 900 students. One of my good friends I took pre-med with was Bill Locke. He is still a doctor in Reno...he finished the course; I didn't. Dr. Pasutti was another good friend of mine.

Were there many young men attending the university at that time from the southern part of the state?

There were some. One of my very good friends was Clarence Heckethorn, who was the head of the Public Service Commission for a good many years. [Another was] Artemus Ham, who was a very prominent attorney in Las Vegas.

From the eastern part of the state were the Griswolds, some mining engineers whose names I can't recall...from Reno, the Creels, the Wilsons. Tom Wilson ran the advertising establishment in Reno for so many years: Wilson's Advertising Agency. He just died recently.

There was also Frank Beloso, Joe Cleary, Clif Quilici, Hugo Quilici, Hugh Gallagher, Coe Swobe and many more. These were all fraternity brothers of mine.

What were the years you were at college?

Nineteen thirty-six to 1941. I got sick one year and had to drop out for one semester.

What did you do in 1941?

I graduated. Grant Sawyer, [who became] governor, was in my class. I graduated in May, and at that time they were saying, "Join the service. Go in for a year, and you'll go home." But I decided I didn't want to go into the service that year, so I went to Los Angeles. I went to a riveting school for about 6 weeks with another friend of mine from the university, "Antz" Olson. We both obtained jobs at Lockheed Aircraft. We were working in the construction of the P-38 fighter plane that was so famous during World War II. I also made the B-26 bomber. Anyhow, I worked there for 2 or 3 months, and then I was drafted into the Army Air Corps. This was unusual at that time because you had to enlist to get into the air corps, but because of my background at Lockheed, why, they drafted me in the air corps. I spent 6½ years active duty and stayed in the reserve for 30 years. I retired as a lieutenant colonel. I served in Africa and Europe for 27 months during World War II. I was in Italy for over a year.

I went overseas in May of 1943 in one of the largest convoys that ever traveled from the United States to Europe. We were escorted by 8 destroyers and a battleship—the battleship *Texas*. Our convoy split, and [part of it] went to Casablanca. We went into Oran just after Rommel had been defeated in the deserts there; the destruction was very evident as we traveled across that country. We spent about a year in Italy, were in the invasion of southern France, back to Italy, and then home and discharged. I stayed with the reserves, and during the Vietnam War I was called in as an officer of the Selective Service System here in Nevada. I worked under our director, Addison Millard, until I was retired. That was my military background.

What was going on in Virginia City when you came back after the Second World War?

During World War II the town got down to probably its lowest ebb. There was probably only about 300 people living here at the time. But after the war—it had already established itself as a tourist attraction in the 1930s—people started to come here to Virginia City [again]. Businessmen and different people came in and opened up different businesses, and it was promoted as more of a tourist town. They tried to start the mining again, but it wasn't too successful at this time. As the years rolled on the tourist business increased tremendously, and many new businesses and enterprises were started and grew up after that period of time.

Do you remember any of the people who came in to promote tourism in Virginia City?

I suppose I should mention my father was one of the most important ones. He had all his old records and his own personal history background for the Comstock. Along with my mother, he spent many hours talking to people, looking up family names and backgrounds and promoting tourism in that way. Not tourism so much, but historical background for people who were interested. He loved to talk about it. People came in after [the war]. Oh, my gosh, Pat Hart was one of the men that came back from World War II and opened a bar. Pat was a very affluent Irishman. He was killed in an automobile accident coming out of Carson City.

What was the name of his bar?

The Brass Rail.

That's still standing, isn't it?

Oh, yes, but if Pat could see it today he'd turn over in his grave. They serve sandwiches

and sell souvenirs and all this stuff. But let's not compare that with Pat Hart's Brass Rail.

There was also a fellow by the name of Phil Dorst. He opened up a saloon just down the street from us. He brought in a group of students from UCLA that were studying acting and [the] arts, and he put on the old melodramas in the saloon and served chicken in the basket and beer and drinks from the bar. He was quite successful, but as these kids grew older and got out of school they went into other enterprises.

Then there was a little old fellow by the name of Paul Smith who sold all kinds of junk and souvenirs. He made quite a bit of money. [He was] a tiny little guy that jumped around like a jumping jack.

There was another fellow by the name of Roy Shetler who opened up another store and sold a lot of souvenirs and made himself quite a fortune.

The McBrides, who own the Bucket of Blood, promoted their business and had a lot of antiques in there. Old Mr. McBride came from Winnemucca, and he was interested in the history of the Virginia City area. He came here during the 1930s. His son, Don, now has the operation, and he has extended it to about 5 or 6 different businesses. He's been quite successful and been very promotional for Virginia City. He spends a lot of money on advertising, promotes a lot of projects and is quite an asset to the town.

Angelo Petrini, who is kind of a latecomer, has developed his Delta Saloon into quite an attraction for visitors. He also has several other enterprises that attract a lot of tourists to the Virginia City area.

The Delta. That wasn't always called the Delta, was it?

No. Just after World War II that bar was run by 2 of my old buddies: Johnny Zalac and

Eddie Colletti. In those days they called it the Smokery, but they changed the name to the Delta. The Delta itself was located just north of where the present establishment is.

That's the one that dates from the early Comstock period.

Yes.

You mentioned that Phil Dorst brought in some college students who were interested in [the] arts. That brings me to one of the final topics I would like to discuss with you. I understand that Virginia City has been attracting artists for some time. Could you tell me something about that?

Well, going back to about 1946 or so, 2 names that come to my mind are Lou Hughes and Lou Siegriest. They were both from the Bay Area, and they were both pretty prominent artists. Lou Siegriest was probably the most prominent at that time.

During the 1950s a man by the name of Cal Bromund came to Virginia City. Before he came here and started his art career he was a jeweler for Herz Jewelry Company in Reno, Nevada. His wife, Mae, who just died recently, was a very upstanding lady. Together they were quite an asset to Virginia City. Cal's paintings are really quite valuable at the present time. For our twenty-fifth anniversary he gave Margaret and I that little one that was a cabin they used to retreat to in northern Idaho when they wanted to get away from everybody.

For many years Mae used to lead the Fourth of July parade in her royal regalia down through C Street and have quite a time of it. [They were] very prominent Republicans, and she took quite a delight in coming to all the Democratic functions wearing all the

Republican badges and breaking us up. She was quite noticeable to all us good Democrats. [laughter]

The artists used to display their paintings in the basement of the Catholic church. One lady, by the name of Mrs. Curran, kind of acted as a curator and stayed there for many, many years, until the change in priests and policy forced her out of the basement of the church. Then these same people took up residence in the old hospital. At the present time they have different groups come in during the summer months. Some are sculptors, some are artists, and they stay there for a certain period of time. They have instructors, and they go out and do painting and sculpting around Virginia City. It's still quite an active affair during the summer months. Mrs. Curran is still quite active with that program.

Earlier we discussed social clubs that were in Virginia City during the nineteenth century. I know that there are still social clubs in Virginia City today. Do you belong to any of these?

Well, I belong to the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] and the American Legion, but our membership is small. It's hard to get together for meetings, so all we do is collect dues and pay into the state and national collections.

But there is still an active Masonic Lodge here, and they meet in the Odd Fellows Hall; and the Eagles Lodge and the AWVS [American Women's Voluntary Service] still meet here. Along with the Masonic Lodge there is a ladies' lodge, the Eastern Star. They still meet here on a regular basis.

What social events are still celebrated in Virginia City?

Well, outside of Christmas the most important day of the year is St. Patrick's Day.

It always falls on 17 March, but on 16 March the Sons of Erin, which I belong to— this is an Irishmen's descent organization—come from Reno and paint the line down the middle of C Street green. Last year we painted it in a blizzard while our local band was playing, and the next morning when they plowed the streets the gutter was green. It looked kind of attractive, but the line down the middle of the street was gone! On St. Patrick's Day, the PTA puts on a corned-beef and cabbage dinner at the high school. They have dancing, and it's quite a social event. I always try to get to the microphone and sing a couple of Irish songs. Last year they honored me as an outstanding Irishman in Virginia City and presented me with some gifts. Mr. Hugh Gallagher gave quite an oratory about me. I think he exaggerates a little bit—but it was nice to hear.

Many years ago a fellow by the name of Don McGuirk used to get up early in the morning and paint the street all by himself, but then other people got into the act. Another fellow came to town by the name of Russ Kealy, and the 2 of them did it. Both of those 2 fine Irish gentlemen are dead now. Anyhow, one year they painted the street. The man who was the janitor of the courthouse—an old-time Comstocker—Jim Byrne and his wife, Millie—a member of the Piper family—lived in the Piper house. Right alongside of the opera house they raised chickens. Don and Russ had a couple of little drinks, and when they finished painting the street they went up and painted Jim's chickens green. When Millie got up that morning and went outside, she saw her chickens. She went back in and hollered at Jim, "Jim, look what's happened to our chickens! It's that goddamn atomic bomb! They've turned their colors on them!" [laughter]

Was this in the 1950s by chance?

Yes. Then last year I was working at the legislature, and I sang a couple of songs for the ladies upstairs. So the secretary of the assembly asked me if I would sing for the assembly, and I said, "Sure." So they stopped the proceedings of the assembly, escorted me into the chambers, and I sang them "When Irish Eyes are Smiling." So as I was walking down the hall Senator Jacobson said, "Would you mind doing it for the senate?"

I said, "I'm Irish, ain't I?" So he escorted me into the senate chambers, they stopped all their proceedings, and I sang a few songs for the senate.

Would you do one for us?

It's kind of the wrong time of day, but I'll try one:

There's a tear in your eye, and I'm wonderin' why, for it never should be there a'tall.

With such pow'r in your smile, sure a stone you'd beguile, and there's never a tear drop should fall.

With your sweet lilting laughter like some fairy song, and your eyes twinkle bright as can be;

You should laugh all the while and all other times smile and now smile a smile for me.

When Irish eyes are smilin', sure 'tis like a mornin' spring,

With the lilt of Irish laughter you can hear the angels sing.

When Irish hearts are happy, all the world is bright and gay;

But when Irish eyes are smiling, sure'n' they steal your heart away.
[laughter]

That was wonderful. Thank you. That was great!

There were other functions in Virginia City all through the year, and now that we are through with the most important....

It was good to start with the most important.
[laughter]

[Well, let's start with] New Year's. People enjoy coming to Virginia City for New Year's Eve. They wander up and down the street and sing a few songs. A few of us have *hors d'oeuvres* out, and they enjoy that and the good comradeship at that time.

Then the alumni have their function. It used to be in April, but now it's in July. We have a gold tournament, a dinner, a dance and a few other things. The money that we raise from that is used for scholarships for the kids graduating from high school. This year, 1984, they gave out four \$500 scholarships. A little later on in the [year] the Jeep Posse has a similar type of function. They have their function in the old ice house. They've changed that into a social building.

During the summer we have the Firemen's Muster. This has been going on now for about 3 years. It's kind of a family affair and a very good one. It attracts a lot of fine people from Washington, Oregon, California and Idaho. They bring all their old antique fire equipment to town, have a parade, and display the old equipment in the park. They also have their own exercises that the firemen perform for time, speed and that type of thing. Then they put on a big dance and dinner and have a lot of fun at that. [Then], in September the camel races attract a good many people.

The firemen also put on a Christmas party, and every child up through the sixth grade in Storey County gets a Christmas present and a Christmas sock. They used to go all [the way] through grammar school, but it just got too big for them. Every child is remembered and gets a nice present, and if they're not there, they're delivered to their homes. They've been doing this now since World War II, and to this day they still carry on that fine project.

Then we also have—on a smaller scale—clay pigeon shoots, trap shoots and this sort of thing. This is sponsored by the Jeep Posse during the summer months.

Then we've had a couple of organizations that have no real meaning or place in history, but are just for fun—like the Virginia City Yacht Club. This was just a fun thing. It was founded under the premise of no lake, no river, no ocean, just a bunch of guys that got together for a little bit of fun. [laughter]

Anybody could join? [laughter]

Anybody could join....

We also have the Fourth of July parade sponsored by the AWVS, and the ladies—one in particular, Barbara Smith—hang flags up and down the length and breadth of C Street on both sides of the street. The firemen [also] raise the flag on the top of Mount Davidson. [The parade] has nice entries and floats from Virginia City and Gold Hill. Then they have a little fun down at the park, and afterward some drinks and stuff for participants. It's well attended—a nice little affair. Sometimes they have fireworks at night—depending on the summer. We are so afraid of fire here that we don't always do that. This year we didn't have any fireworks. It was strictly a parade and then the affair down at the park. I think

that these are the main things that we have going on [today].

Well, I've run out of questions. I would like to thank you for the very interesting and informative interview we have had.

PHOTOGRAPHS



The painted wall of Grandma's Fudge shop depicts the International Hotel.



"The Crystal Bar has always been famous for its mixed drinks."



The Washoe Club "where all the big shots gathered [and] were entertained."



Previously destroyed by fire, St. Mary's in the Mountains was rebuilt in 1875.



“When President Grant was in Virginia City in 1878 he stayed at the Savage Mansion, and he delivered a speech from the balcony.”

Photographs by N.J. Broughton

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